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THE MEASUREMENT OF SOCIAL PRESSURE.

BY FRANKLIN H. GIDDINGS.

Any massing of living organisms into local aggregates interferes in a degree with the freedom of action of each individual organism. The aggregation of human beings in communities occasions a relatively high degree of interference, because merely physical obstruction is supplemented by the restrictions of liberty that are imposed by psychological evolution. The thought and the will of each affects the conduct of all: the concerted will of many often restrains or coerces the behavior of any one or of a few.

Let us call the restraining or compelling power which the social aggregate imposes upon its units a social pressure. Is it possible to investigate social pressure by quantitative methods? Can we measure it? The purpose of this brief paper is to describe a method of obtaining index numbers of social pressure. I have been led to believe that it is quite as possible to determine relative intensities and changes of social pressure in different nations, commonwealths, or minor communities, as it is by the same general method to determine changes in the purchasing power of gold from time to time or from place to place.

In modern communities the social will finds definite expression in legislation, and social pressure is therefore most extensively and precisely exerted through the forms of law. Of these forms the statutes enacted by legislatures are relatively explicit, they admit of classification, and they can be counted. Penalties for non-observance also admit of numerical statement. With relatively few exceptions, they are fines, ranging from one dollar up, or terms of imprisonment for stated periods.

As expressions of social pressure, statutes fall naturally into the following classification. Some prohibit or deny, as, for example, an enactment forbidding a specified form of gambling

or forbidding the sale of intoxicating drinks. Some restrict, by establishing a State monopoly or otherwise, as, for example, the federal statutes creating a postal system. Some regulate, as, for example, statutes governing banking, insurance, or railway transportation. Under the first of these categories we may conveniently make as many as five subdivisions according to penalty. Under each of the other categories we may make the subdivisions "generally," and "local only." Adding to our categories the class "Unrestricted,"—that is to say, all acts or kinds of behavior that the State does not prohibit, restrict, or regulate, save in that minor degree which is described as "keeping the peace,"—we have a gradation from "Prohibited" down to "Unrestricted" of ten degrees, which may be designated by the numerals from ten down to one. In like manner the law may make certain acts or relations compulsory; it may create an agent or commission as an organ of government with power; or it may merely maintain or aid an enterprise at public cost. All remaining acts and relations may be classed as "Voluntary." The category "Compulsory" may be subdivided into five grades according to penalty, and the category "Established as an Organ of Government" may be subdivided into the grades "with maximum," "with medium," and "with minimum power." We may thus again get ten degrees of social pressure, which may be designated by numerals from ten down to one.

Using these gradation categories as column headings, we may then, as in the accompanying form, construct a table of legal provisions in force in any commonwealth, so as to show their significance as manifestations of social pressure.

It will be observed that the number entered against any item is the number that stands at the head of the column to which as a fact of classification the provision in question is properly assigned. The investigator, therefore, does not mark according to any subjective standard. The values are assigned in advance. He has only to be careful to avoid errors of classification, and his decisions can be checked by other investigators or by his readers, his data always being accessible.

Footing the columns, obtaining the grand total, and dividing by the whole number of items marked, an arithmetical average is obtained which is similar in form to index numbers in general. May it be accepted as in fact an index number of social pressure for the Commonwealth described?

The most obvious objection is that the enactment of a law does not necessarily mean enforcement. If we had comprehensive and accurate statistics of prosecutions and convictions and of orders of injunction and mandamus, it would of course be desirable to subdivide our categories further, so as to show gradations of enforcement. Statistics of this kind, however, are notoriously defective, and an attempt to mark degrees of enforcement would introduce the uncertainties of subjective estimate.

I am satisfied that the objection itself is not a serious one. The community has other ways of enforcing its will which supplement the legal process. There is an immense amount of coercion which is exercised through public opinion, social favor or disfavor, and the conceding or withholding of business opportunity; and observation will, I think, confirm the judgment that, when the community or some interest in the community feels strongly enough upon any given subject to express its will in statute law, it can and does in a large measure enforce its decree in extra-legal ways, even when the statute itself is enforced but imperfectly. I conclude, then, that the actual enacting of a statute by a legislative body is, in practically every case, an index of actually existing social pressure.

It should be explained, perhaps, that this is true even when the pressure originates with a minority or even with a few individuals, since even then it is an actually disturbing influence affecting in some measure the liberty of all other individuals upon whom it impinges.

The simplest way to obtain such an index number as has been described would be to count up from the statute books all the acts of any category, for example, the category "Prohibited," and falling within a given range as to penalty, multiply this number by the grade number at the head of

the column, enter the product in the column, and so proceed with each subdivision of each category; that is to say, with each column. This method would have, however, the very serious objection that the investigator's procedure could not be followed and checked by his readers, and mistakes of classification and of counting could therefore pass undetected.

The method of full detail (that is, of entering at the left-hand margin of the table every item of legislative enactment) is open to the quite different objections that it is exceedingly cumbersome, and that it leaves much to be desired in respect of possible groupings of similar things, whereby the incidence of social pressure upon various phases of individual or of collective action might advantageously be exhibited.

I prefer, therefore, a scheme according to which a rather full list of items, grouped according to certain sociological categories, is presented in the left-hand margin of the table. Supplementing this list should be the items "All Other Prohibitions," "All Other Restrictions," "All Other Regulations," etc. The number corresponding to each of these items (*e.g.*, the number of "All Other Prohibitions" as counted) should be multiplied by the grade number at the top of the proper column,—penalties having been averaged,—and the product should be entered in the column.

The objection may be made to this last procedure, as it might be made to the method of complete detail, that in comparing one commonwealth with another we sometimes find that in one commonwealth prohibitions are itemized which in another commonwealth are brought under one general prohibition. We, therefore, might have three or four entries of any given number in one table, and in another table only one entry, the facts being substantially the same in the two cases, except in respect of one point, statutory detail. I am disposed to think that this complication does not vitiate the procedure, because I believe that the specific itemizing of legal commands is itself usually an index of social pressure; that is to say, it is usually a higher degree of social pressure which makes detailed or specific prohibitions or demands, instead of general ones.

There is one final and important reason for making any such table rather detailed. Having a large number of numerical entries in the columns, we may advantageously obtain all deviations, item by item, from the mode and from our final average or index number, and get the standard deviations. These, showing the degree of closeness of clustering about the average and the mode, are index numbers of some value, inasmuch as it is a generally accepted corollary of the principle of evolution that variation from type diminishes with increasing environmental pressure upon the type. In terms of social causation, this means that increasing social pressure, manifesting itself in law, tends to create uniformity of conduct. Some indication of the extent to which this actually happens should be afforded by the standard deviations.

I hope in a subsequent paper to present a number of detailed tables, with actual index numbers of social pressure, for certain American commonwealths, and in connection with them to touch upon various questions of interpretation.